

Win-win approach to mitigating development impacts



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Guest columnist

Growth of the Houston area and surrounding counties has resulted in continued degradation of the area water quality to the point where most of the streams and rivers in the greater Houston area fail the state and national standards for their defined use.

The primary causes of water quality degradation are related to increased sediment load, high bacteria levels and, to a lesser extent, high nutrient levels, according to the Houston-Galveston Area Council 2010 Basin Highlights Report.

For the most part these problems are accentuated by poor land management and development practices.

Actions by citizens and local and state authorities have resulted in improvements to some streams in Harris County, while some waters in Montgomery County are exhibiting a decline as development proceeds.

The decline in the quality of Lake Conroe waters may only be the initial warning that Montgomery County needs to take a more proactive approach to mitigating the effects. Continued degradation of surface water quality can be costly in the form of increased cost of processing drinking water, increased legal costs related to violating standards for surface water quality, increasing restrictions to future development and increased health risks related to contact recreation.

Harris County's experience suggests that these problems and related costs can be minimized if tackled early through a cooperative effort of business, citizens and local government.

The recent slowdown in the economy has given us a breather to develop and start implementing protection plans for our county waters.

In this regard, the Houston-Galveston Area Council is applying for federal money to develop watershed protection plans for both Lake Creek and San Bernard watersheds.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality is planning to start a more extensive evaluation of Lake Creek this spring and some citizens continue to monitor the quality of the creek. These results will be compared with other studies to identify potential problems that will need to be addressed in a watershed protection plan.

In addition, citizens groups, including Keep Montgomery Beautiful and the East 1488 Community Association, are involved in community education programs.

While the involvement of nonprofit organizations and state and local government is essential to obtaining the necessary financial and legislative action, a program will not be successful without the participation and support of the citizens in the county and the landowners adjacent to our critical waterways.

Citizens can help by better understanding the issues and talking to their state and county legislators. In that regard, Keep Montgomery County Beautiful and the East 1488 Community Association are prepared to make presentations to citizens groups and help coordinate a petition for the support of our state and county officials.

Organizations interested in a presentation on the subjects should contact Charlotte Harris at info@kmcbtexas.org, (832) 567-3404; or Glenn Buckley at grbuckley419@comcast.net, (936) 520-6955.

Additionally, there are potential tax and, in some cases, direct financial benefits for certain residents owning tracts of land along county waterways.

Those owners should contact Jennifer Lorenz at www.bayoulandconservancy.org for information on conservation easement and developing a bank for wetland mitigation. There may also be some monies available from the Natural Resource Conservation Service for those landowners who wish to develop land management practices consistent with preserving the quality of adjacent waterways.

Contact John Fancher, the district conservationist for Montgomery County, at John.Fancher@tx.usda.gov for more information concerning the NRCS.

Buckley is on the Board of Directors of both Keep Montgomery County Beautiful. For more information about the organization visit www.kmcbtexas.org.